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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

HINTS ON THE CARE OF OTTERS

TRAITS:

Otters are playful, docile, and intelligent. They come when called, and show attachment for their keepers. Water is their proper element, their structure being better adapted for swimming than for running.

FOOD:

Wild otters subsist mainly on fish, frogs, crawfish, and other aquatic creatures. When these fail they kill warm-blooded animals. Young otters have been raised in confinement on a diet of milk and cornmeal mush, supplemented by fish or meat as they matured. A reliable source of fresh fish obtainable at slight cost is essential to success in raising otters for fur.

BREEDING:

In the Northern States otters probably mate in February. The young are born about two months later, and are mature when one year old. The number in a litter ranges from one to five. Otters have been bred in confinement.

INCLOSURE:

The size of an otter yard should not be less than 12 feet by 20 feet. It should contain a pool of clear water two or three feet deep, fed from a constant source.

The fence may be built of upright boards, galvanized sheet iron, or 2-inch-mesh, 14-gauge, wire netting. Its height must be three and a half feet greater than the maximum depth of snow. An inward horizontal overhang, of sheet iron one foot wide, must be provided at the top of the fence, while the bottom should extend into the ground a foot and a half.

The den, two feet wide, two feet high, and five or six feet long, should be tightly built to exclude drafts. The entrance should be near the end of one of the sides. It is important to construct dens so they may be opened from time to time for disinfection.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY
WASHINGTON, D. C.

BREEDING OTTERS.

Otters do not climb or jump well. A fence of boards, sheet iron, or wire netting three feet high and having a horizontal inward overhang of 18 inches will hold them. If netting be used, it should be made of wire not smaller than No. 12 gauge. Fences should extend down into the earth to a depth of about 2 feet and thence inward at right angles about 2 feet. A pond or stream in each yard is desirable. Wild otters subsist almost entirely on fish, and this food should be used for their main diet. Otters have bred in confinement. They are docile and affectionate when kindly handled, and become engaging pets. Each female should have an enclosure to herself during the breeding season. At other times, unless some individual among them is vicious, all the adults may be allowed the run of a large yard.

A pen 12 feet by 20 feet with a double compartment kennel attached will probably suffice for a female with her young until the young are running about. After this time they need more runway and water to bathe and play in.

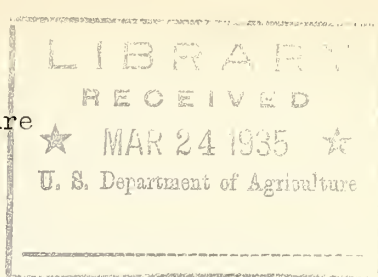
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United States Department of Agriculture
Bureau of Biological Survey



HINTS ON THE CARE OF OTTERS

In the absence of dependable experiments in breeding, feeding, and handling otters in captivity, the problem of whether they can be raised on a commercial scale is still to be solved. A generation ago fur producers seemed optimistic on the future of otter ranching, though few of the animals that have been kept in confinement in zoological parks for exhibition purposes have produced young. Under exhibition conditions, with the disturbance caused by the presence of visitors, otters apparently do not have the seclusion they require for breeding. In the one or two instances that young were born they did not live to maturity. Perhaps under favorable surroundings otters can be raised profitably, but prolonged experiments must be conducted before their production in captivity can be recommended definitely as a promising industry.

TRAITS:

Otters are playful, docile, and intelligent. Many individuals held in confinement show attachment for their keepers and come when called. Water is necessary for their well-being, as they are perfectly adapted for swimming, although they sometimes travel overland for considerable distances.

FOOD:

Wild otters subsist mainly on fishes, frogs, crawfishes, and other aquatic creatures. When these fail they sometimes kill warm-blooded animals. Young otters have been raised in confinement on a diet of milk and cornmeal mush, supplemented by fish or meat as they matured. A reliable source of fresh fish obtainable at slight cost is essential to success in raising otters.

BREEDING:

In the Northern States otters probably mate in February. The young are born about two months later and are mature when one year old. The number in a litter ranges from one to five.

INCLOSURE:

The size of an otter yard should not be less than 12 by 20 feet. It should contain a pool of clear water 2 or 3 feet deep, fed from a constant source, and sufficient dry land for exercise for the animals and for placing the den.

The fence may be built of upright boards, galvanized sheet iron, or 3-inch mesh, 14-gauge wire netting. Its height must be 3 1/2 feet greater than the maximum depth of snow. An inward horizontal overhang of sheet iron 1 foot wide must be provided at the top of the fence, and the bottom should extend into the ground 1 1/2 feet.

The den, 2 feet wide, 2 feet high, and 5 or 6 feet long, should be tightly built to exclude drafts. The entrance should be near the end of one of the sides. It is important to construct dens so they may be opened from time to time for disinfection, and they should be wholly within the inclosure.

